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GRAND PRIX OF

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer , Husqvarna and Honda

CZECH REPUBLIC

When the sun had set on the Grand Prix of Czech Republic we all walked away with a feeling that MXGP red-plate owner Tim Gajser has grown in not only race results, but also as a person. His 2-2 performance wasn't perfect, but when he felt uncomfortable while chasing Max Nagl for the GP overall, he didn't try and push over his limit, but instead rode for the points and eliminated any chance of crashing, because at the end of the day the only way this kid is going to lose the 2016 MXGP championship is with a crash. Speed wise, nobody can live with him in MXGP on a regular basis.

"It has not been a bad weekend here," Gajser said. "I am a bit disappointed not to take the win because until the end of the second race we had done enough to have taken the overall, but still we take a lot of important points which is good. In the second race I took the holes hot which was great so I'm really happy with the starts this weekend, and also the riding, but just five minutes to go I made a small mistake and was on the ground. Max passed me and I was trying to catch him back but started making more mistakes so I decided to settle for second place. The track today was really bumpy and sketchy, and the rain in the second race made it even harder. It really didn't allow you to make a mistake and you had to respect it a lot, and maybe I was pushing too hard. But still I'm happy enough because we stood on the podium again."

Max Nagl pointed out after the race that he has heard Gajser talking about chasing Antonio Cairoli in Mantova and nearly giving up. Nagl used that as a motivation when the Honda rider started catching him. The Husqvarna factory rider then

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pushed that little bit harder, taking it to the edge and making Gajser quit his chase.

"It was a great GP for us. Despite only having the 14th gate pick, I managed to get two great starts in the final motos. In the first race I quickly passed Gautier Paulin for the lead and started pushing hard as I knew Tim Gajser was following me. I wanted to avoid being passed by any means, so I gave it all to remain out front until the end. In the second race Tim got the lead right after the start and I was third behind Butron. I quickly passed him and started putting in fast laps to close the gap to Tim. My plan was to put pressure on him and that's exactly what happened. He made a mistake a few laps before the end and when I got the lead I just went for it. Getting two race wins for my first overall victory this season is just great. It's so good for the team and a great confidence booster for me as well. I want to enjoy the moment and this victory and I'm looking forward to the next GP in Lommel."

Defending MXGP champion Romain Febvre showed what a champion he is. Coming back from that horrible crash in England the French rider produced 3-3 scores and a podium finish. His championship might be gone, but you can be sure he will battle for more championship in the coming years.

"For sure I am happy to be back on my YZ450FM and racing again. I was out for nearly one month to recover from my crash in England, and in that time I missed some training because it was not possible to get on the bike until I recov-

ered completely. I was fine physically, but the reaction time between my vision and my brain needed rest and attention in order to come back. Now I am 100 percent and it's very good to get this result today. The conditions here were very slippery, because this is hardpack and there was a little bit of rain today. Next week we go back to the heavy sand at Lommel and it will be a very different GP in Belgium."

As for Grand Prix legends Antonio Cairoli, his reign at the top seems to be over. It's hard to imagine even a 100% fit Cairoli being able to deal with Gajsers speed, and for sure not when Jeffrey Herlings arrives in the MXGP class in 2017. It is hard to feel sorry for the Italian, eight world titles, and a place in the MXGP hall of fame is assured. Not only that, but a bank full of money and a lifestyle he couldn't never have expected as a kid.

"I was back on the KTM 350 SX-F after almost a year. The race didn't go how I wanted for sure but we had a good feeling with the bike in the time practice. I was able to improve my speed from before and I felt better on the bike overall. But we messed up the starts because it was almost a year since I started on the 350. On this track if you have a bad start you don't go anywhere. You could see that with Nagl. He wasn't the fastest in practice but in the races he had two good starts and he won." Cairoli also confirmed he is looking forward to racing at Lommel next weekend. Because he lives part of the time in Belgium, it is like a home race for him.

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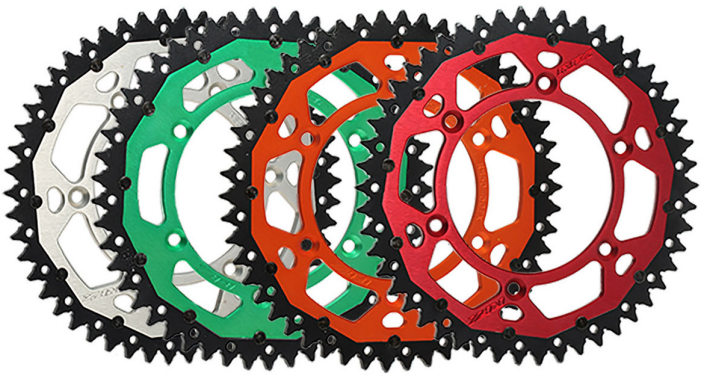

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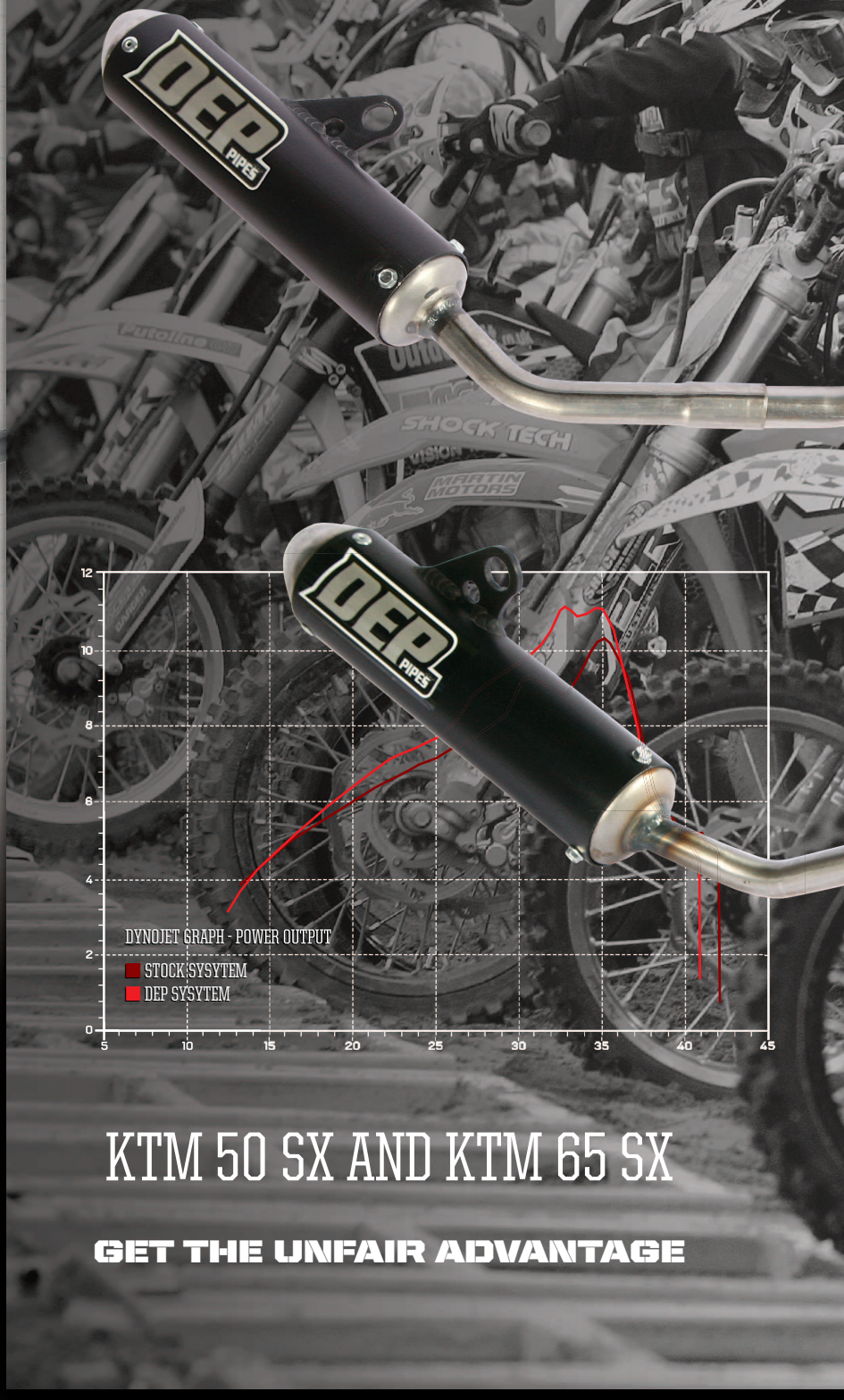

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ANTONIO CAIROLI

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

It remains one of the biggest and at times saddest questions of the 2016 season. Is Grand Prix legend Antonio Cairoli finished in terms of winning another world motocross championship? We all knew he was fast enough to win GP's again, and I have no doubt he will win a few more before his career is over, but a world championship? I just don't know anymore.

When the season started in Qatar in late February he was carrying an injury, yet he still battled hard with Tim Gajser and Romain Febvre in round two in Thailand, and has had his good moments throughout the first 13 rounds. Performances like yesterday though are just not what we are used to from Cairoli.

Making matters even more confusing was his comments that it wasn't a bad weekend. Seventh overall, and now 109 points down on Tim Gajser it's hard to see Cairoli come back. In fact, I think there is more chance of him being dropped from second in the championship to fourth the way Max Nagl and Romain Febvre rode last weekend.

"Overall It wasn't a bad weekend; my feeling with the bike has improved compared to the 450, even if there has been a lack of good starts. I changed the bike just a week ago and we had not the time to practice enough with the starts, underestimating this detail and now we have paid the price, because on a track like this, if you start in front you could get better result."

Cairoli made in debut on the KTM 350 SX-F this weekend in Loket, after he took with his team and the Austrian manufacturer the decision to switch from the 450, to the bike with which he won five World Champions title in a row.

"In race one I had a bad start, compromising the result and then in race two my wrist, that has not yet completely healed,

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caused me some trouble when I went hard on a bump with my front wheel. Overall I'm happy to have found back a bike that gives me confidence and that I enjoy riding and now we have a lot of work to do, because there are many new things to test and details to be developed."

The thirteenth round of the MXGP series, on the hard soil track of Loket, was characterized by sudden weather changes that have modified the track conditions, making it more than once, slippery and tricky.

Saturday, after two positive sessions of practice, Tony took a good start in the qualifying heats but went on the ground after a contact with a rival and being forced to make a comeback from the back to grab the seventh place finish.

It all started badly in the first half of Sunday, the Red Bull KTM Factory Racing Team rider had turned thirteenth at the first corner, facing a tough race, which saw him pass the finish line again seventh.

Having a better start in race two, the Sicilian champion suffered a severe pain on the hand, injured in England, after landing hard from a jump, in the early stages of the race, losing several positions. Then he found the right rhythm and was able to pass under the checkered flag in eighth place, holding the second place in the standings. The fourteenth round of the 2016 MXGP will take place in Belgium next week, on the sandy track of Lommel.

"On the bike now there are already 2017 parts and in Lommel we will have some more, that will allow us to finish the season well and to do our best at the Grand Prix of Nations."

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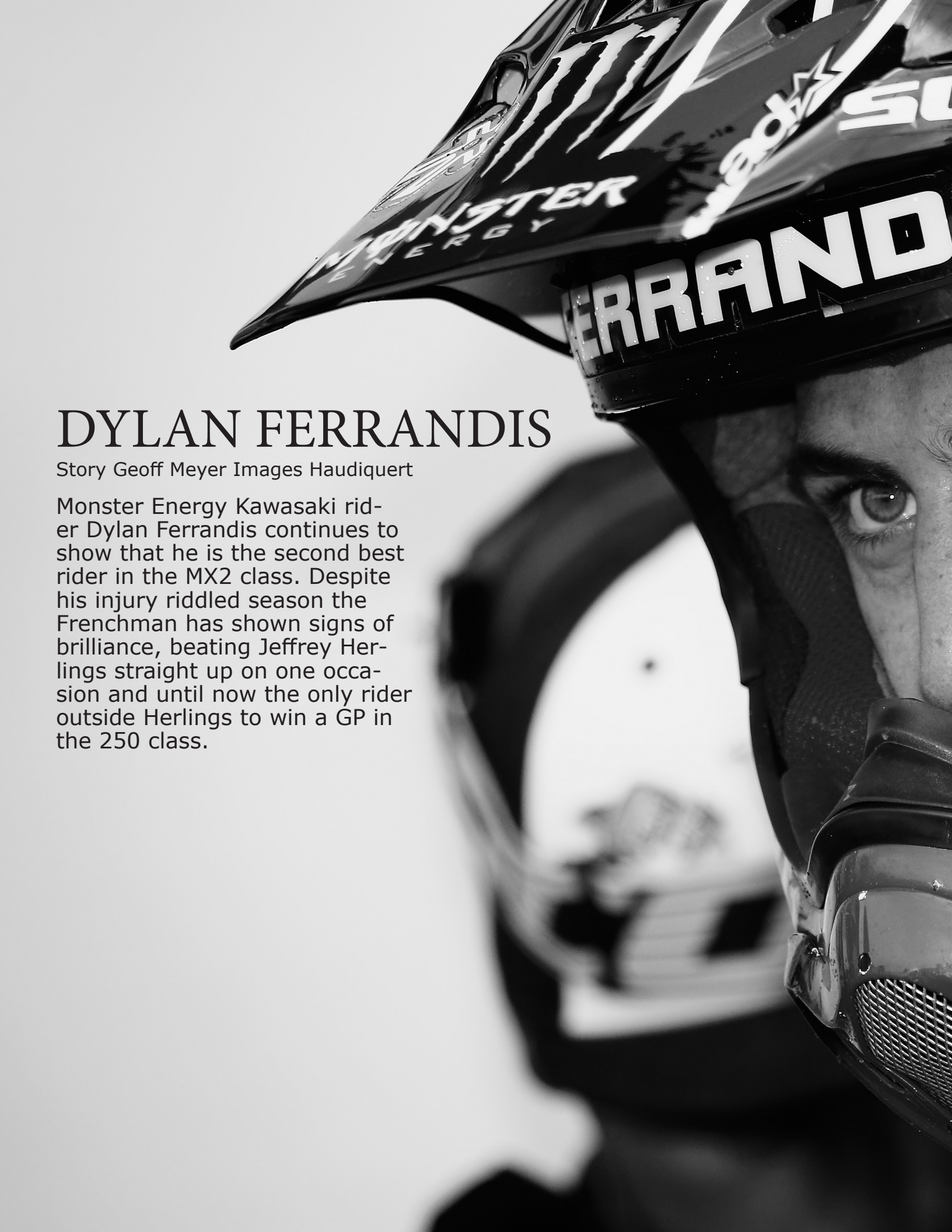

DYLAN FERRANDIS

Story Geoff Meyer Images Haudiquert

Monster Energy Kawasaki rider Dylan Ferrandis continues to show that he is the second best rider in the MX2 class. Despite his injury riddled season the Frenchman has shown signs of brilliance, beating Jeffrey Herlings straight up on one occasion and until now the only rider outside Herlings to win a GP in the 250 class.

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Taking victory at the Loket circuit Ferrandis was the perfect answer to the French federation as he hopes to be picked for the French team for this year's MXoN, set for Maggiora in two months' time.

"In the first moto I was second behind Jonass but he crashed, and I was able to make the gap with my rivals to win this moto; I just tried to save some energy for the second moto and that was necessary as my start was not as good as the first one. I had to fight with the guys to come back to the front of the pack; it was a nice battle even if this race was tough with the rain as we lost some traction. At the end of the moto Max Anstie was pushing really hard; he tried to make a move but finally crashed. That's racing! Of course it was a good weekend with two moto wins. Everyone in the team is happy and we are all rewarded for the hard work we have put in since the beginning of the season. But there is no time to celebrate this win; next weekend we have the most difficult race in the world with the GP at Lommel, and we'll move to Belgium on Monday to prepare for this race."

Just prior to a three week break in the GP calendar, and around the Mantova circuit Ferrandis again led Herlings in a qualification race, only to crash out.

"I was happy with my results on Saturday even though I crashed while leading, as a lapper didn't move. But Sunday was not as good, and it is difficult to understand why. In the first moto my start was average but I had a good first lap and passed Herlings, but then I crashed twice; I came back and passed Pootjes but he took me out! I was happy to come back to third. In the second race the gate moved but didn't fall and I hit it, so I was late into the first corner. I passed almost the entire field to finish sixth; I had good lines and was one of the fastest riders on the track to get this overall podium."

Returning to the podium Ferrandis showed his skills around the Matterley Basin circuit.

"It was great to be back on the podium as I missed it at the last two GPs.

I had a good feeling with the track this weekend; here it was possible to make the difference with the other riders. It's just a shame that my starts were not better as I would like to race with Jeffrey; in both races the gap to him was too great by the time I came to second. We came here after some testing sessions with the team, working mainly on the suspension; on Saturday we made some more changes on the settings, and today the bike was great."

The France GP thought showed just why the youngster still needs to mature as he tried to take Herlings out in a start and then crashed out himself.

"I'm disappointed with the results, I had two very bad starts as I was last in the first corner. I couldn't get good starts on this ground, and then I had to fight for the entire thirty-five minutes to come back in the top eight. I had no fun riding on this track, and everything seems to go wrong at the moment as I'm still waiting for my knee braces and equipment as the airplane company lost my luggage from Spain."

Spain didn't go plans as Ferrandis suffered disappointment around a circuit that has caused him much distress.

"It was a tough weekend on a track where I have some bad memories after my knee injury here last year. It was very difficult to find the best settings for the bike, as the weather and the track conditions were continually changing on both Saturday and Sunday. In the first race I had some difficulty with the front fork settings and couldn't keep the lead; I didn't want to take risks as I got some arm pump so I just concentrated on securing my second position. We made some changes for the second race and the feeling was better, but I got a bad start and in the first corner another rider hit me and damaged my front brake; I was back to sixth behind Tonkov when I lost the front wheel and crashed, and then recovered to fifth. I had a better feeling in the second race, but I'm frustrated that I just missed the podium."

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MX ON THE TEAMS

Story Geoff Meyer images Archer, Honda, and Haudiquert

The closer we get to Maggiora 2016, the more obvious team selection is for a number of teams in the world. Defending champions France have a bit of a problem with too many good riders to select from. Starting with last year's hero Romain Febvre, who returned from injury last weekend. It would be difficult not to start team selection with the defending world MXGP champion. His podium finish in Loket, after being out for a month showed that his speed is still there. But what of the other riders?

Dylan Ferrandis stood on the top of the podium at the MXoN in 2014 and his GP victory last weekend might have locked up the MX2 ride for Maggiora. That battle should be between himself and Marvin Musquin, but it is always difficult to judge Musquins form in a series that lacks serious depth.

Musquin currently third in the AMA 450 championship points might be able to be taken into the team as the second 450cc rider, as Gautier Paulin is out of sorts on the Honda machine. The only problem is Paulin has won two motos at the MXoN in the past and is usually very good around the Maggiora circuit, winning there in 2013, but failing miserably in 2015.

Those are the four riders team France have at their disposal, at least if they want to win three of these four have to be involved.

Team USA don't ever have a problem with picking a solid team, as seen last year when they selected a B-Team and nearly won the event. Eli Tomac is a must, and despite his crashing ways, is their fastest motocross rider at the moment.

The other selections are up in the air with Cooper Webb seemingly a sure thing, as long as the AMA don't take personally what he has said about the series in America. Others are Jeremy Martin, Alex Martin, Justin Barcia and maybe one of the Pro Circuit chargers in Austin Forkner or Joey Savatgy. In all seriousness, you would probably go with Tomac, Webb and Martin, with Barcia an outside chance.

I don't think anyone would be disappointed if Team USA went to the event and dominated, just to remind us they are still world class, and to lock 2016 to that

classic MXoN in 1986, where Johnny O'Mara, David Bailey and Ricky Johnson dominated the world.

Those two teams are without question the heavy favorites, no other team has the depth of these two, and while Team Great Britain have solid riders, Shaun Simpson has been off form, and Tommy Searle has not put his speed into results and Max Anstie has been brilliant in MX2, but is also inconsistent.

Team Belgium are in trouble with lack of form, or injury problems. I guess the best effort would come from Jeremy Van Horebeek, Clement Desalle, and Kevin Strijbos. All experienced and you can never count the Belgians out of this event. National pride will play a part in their results and if Joel Smets has anything to do with it, they will stand on the podium once again in 2016, and with a little luck the top step isn't out of the question.

Team Holland will also have a solid effort. Jeffrey Herlings on the 450 could go 1-1, and if Glenn Coldenhoff can improve his current form, and put something special out there in Maggiora, then they have possible selections from Davy Pootjes and Brian Bogers, both solid MX2 riders.

The Russians with Evgeny Bobryshev, Alexandr Tonkov and Vsevolod Brylyakov are top five potential, as are the Swiss team of Valentin Guillod, Jeremy Seewer and Arnaud Tonus. Wouldn't it be cool to see one of these two teams win it!!!!

Team Australian have good riders in Dean Ferris, Todd Waters and Kirk Gibbs, and for them a top five is possible, just as the Aussies did in 1986 with Craig Dack, Glen Bell and David Armstrong.

Wouldn't it be great if you could have couple of Team USA's (Savatgy, Barcia and Forkner), and a World team, with Tim Gajser, Antonio Cairoli and Pauls Jonass!!!

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GAUTIER PAULIN

Story Geoff Meyer images Bavo Swijgers

HRC rider Gautier Paulin continues to struggle with bike set-up, and it seems confidence. Paulin didn't perform as well as he might have liked at the Grand Prix of Czech Republic, held at the Loket circuit. Going 10-12 for 11th overall. "After Saturday we made a lot of changes for today which in the warm-up were really good and I had good speed to finish fastest. In the first moto I had a good start with the holeshot, but I wasn't feeling confident with the front end and I washed two times the front and crashed.

Since a long time, I haven't had two crashes in a race so it was really bad. In the second moto we again made some changes and with another good start the feeling was good. I wasn't fast enough for the top three, but I think my place was top five. But when Romain passed me I took a stone on my goggles and it popped all the laminate out just as it started raining. It's so stony here there was no chance I was going to take the goggles off, so this really finished my moto. It's not been a good weekend for me but we continue to work hard and focus now on Lommel this coming weekend."

Qualification in Loket wasn't perfect for Paulin as his lack of confidence made it even more difficult to find a good setting.

"The track conditions changed with the rain but that was the same for everyone – we just didn't find the best setup and a good feeling all day today. We made a change for qualifying

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and actually it turned out to be the wrong direction. Tixier made to jump the gate at the start and he was right alongside me so when he moved I lost some concentration and missed the start. Then the track was tricky and I wasn't feeling good on the bike so we struggled today."

Between Italy and Czech Rebublic Paulin and the HRC team continued to try and find the right setting to make the Frenchman happy.

"Since Mantova we had worked hard in testing and training, and I also raced at Iffendic which was great to see so many French fans and supporters out. We've been working hard in testing with my team to keep improving and to keep finding the little adjustments that will help us for this weekend, and I've been working hard on myself for my physical condition so I'm feeling ready for this second part of the season."

The Grand Prix in Mantova proved to be another tough weekend, as he continued to try and get 100% fit and perform at the level he knows he can.

"Saturday I was struggling a little bit in qualifying but we made some adjustments overnight and it worked much better today. From the warm-up I improved a lot. In both races I had pretty good starts, and this weekend to get third and second means we did a good job. I am definitely happy about the weekend. It was really hot, and in Matterley I said I

wanted to work hard to better in some areas that I missed with injury, so to be on the podium here and in these conditions actually I can't believe. I'm really happy for me and for the team, and after a hard time earlier in the season it's just such a good feeling."

"On the Saturday I had a good start and actually had a good lap time and feeling generally good, just the track's been dry and I was struggling with some setup. I couldn't ride the way I wanted to ride so I was tight, not in a good shape and not on the best line, so along with the hot weather nothing was easy today. I was second to the gate, but for tomorrow I think top eight is enough so I am happy enough to finish sixth."

Now onto Lommel, where Paulin hopes he can find some of his previous form. Always strong in the sand don't be surprised if he can once again stand on the podium.

"It's fair to say that we know the ground in Lommel but not the track because they can completely change it. Sure it will be a different track to last year, but that's part of the challenge. It's one of the tracks I like most. We're working hard for this weekend, and I bring the same energy and goal as always so I'm looking forward to a positive weekend."

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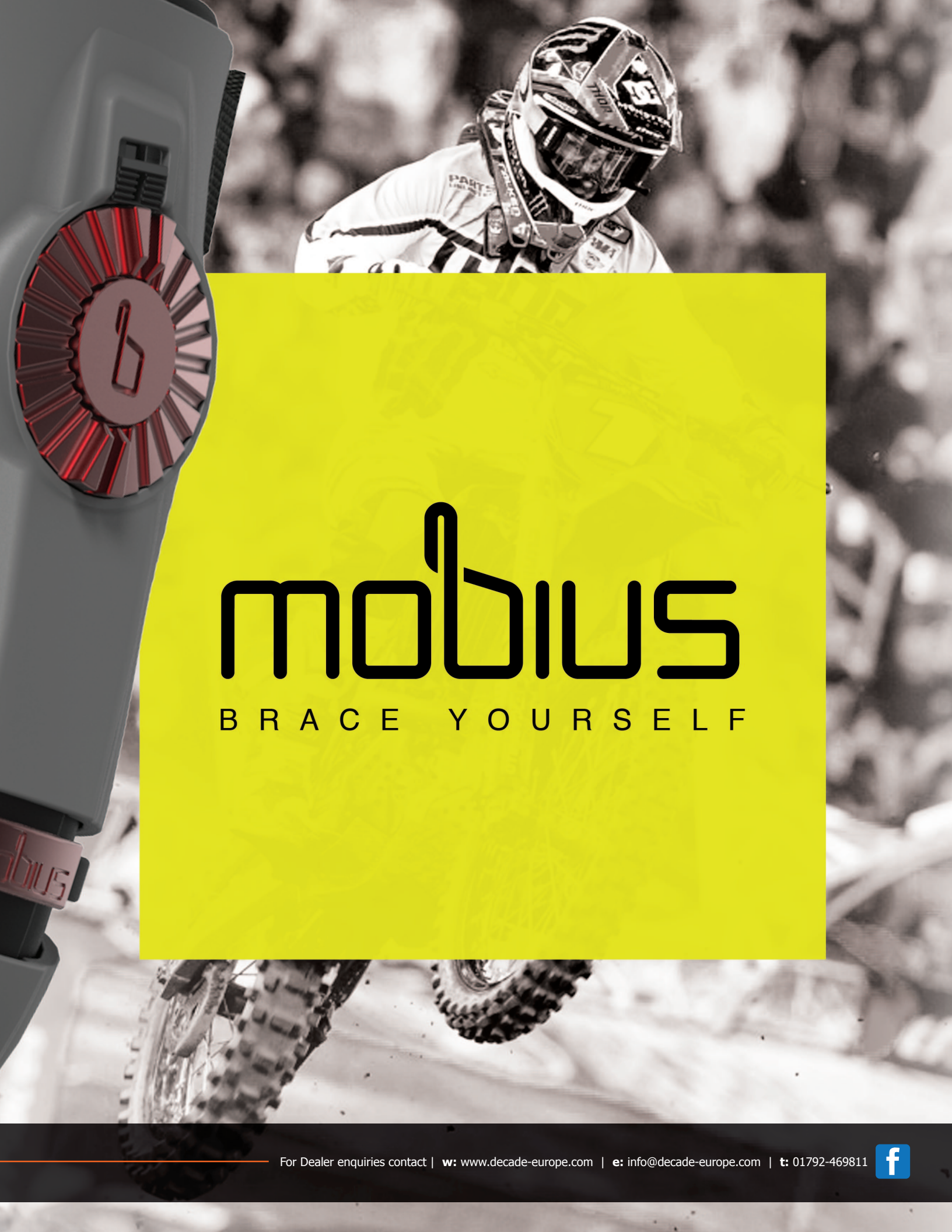

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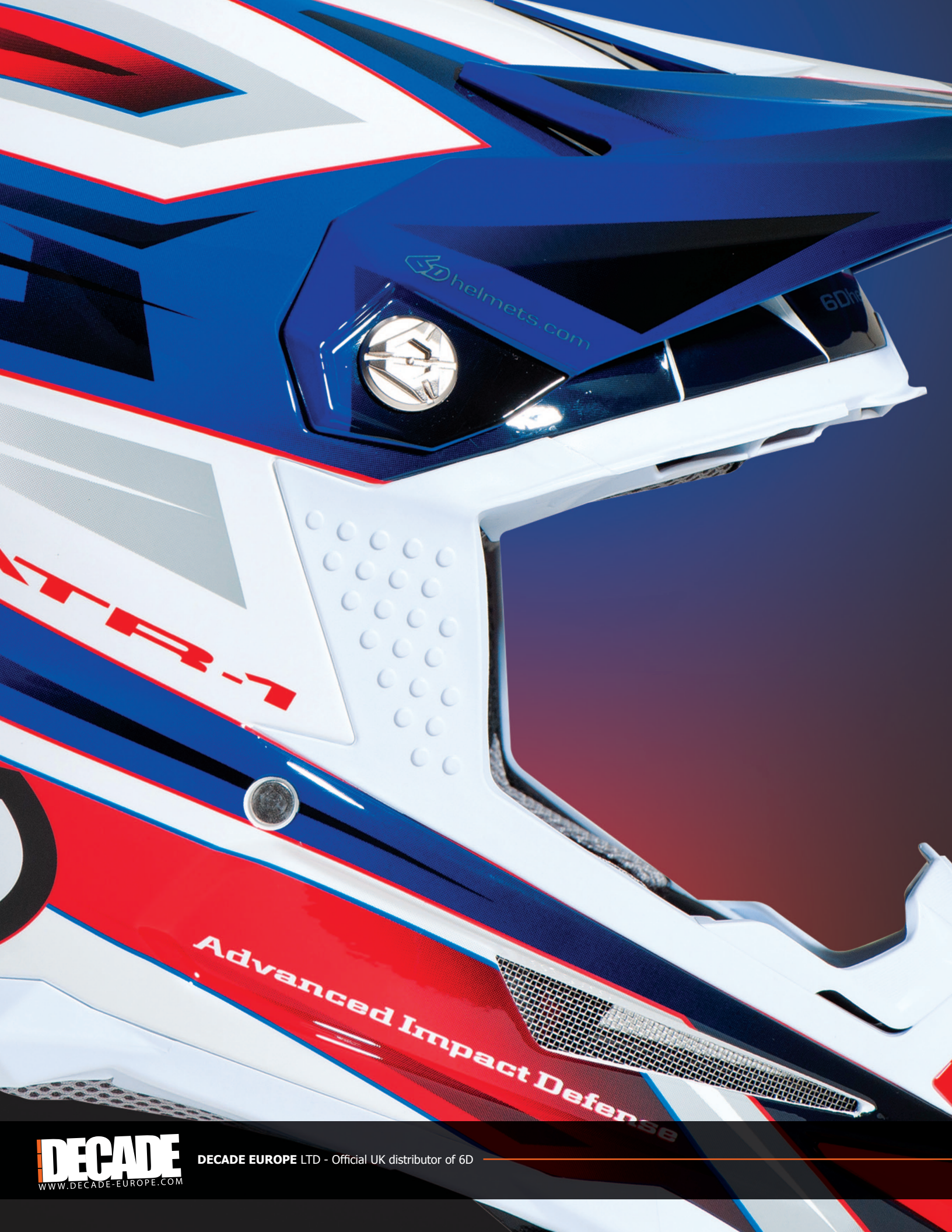

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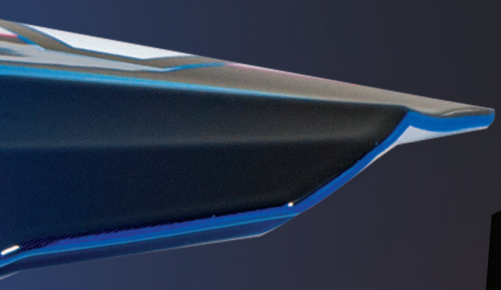

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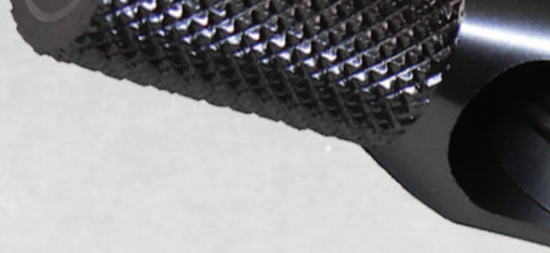

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